awareness campaign through electronic and print media to educate potential migrants about the risks of illegal migration. The regulatory mechanism is being made transparent to address the problem. The Ministry is also examing a proposal to establish an Overseas Workers' Welfare Fund which *inter-alia* will seek to provide on site, off site and return and resettlement services.

(b) and (c) As per the information received from HCI, Kuala Lumpur, their Minister of Home Affairs, has clarified that the Government of Malaysia has not frozen the recruitment of workers from India. He also mentioned that there is no move to limit the intake of workers from India though Malaysia was trying to reduce the number of foreign workers. Government of Malaysia would not approve work permit for any foreign worker who has worked in the country for five years or more. Further, Malaysian Government has not specified, any number that may be sent back by the end of 2009.

Amendment in Emigration Act

2728. SHRI GIREESH KUMAR SANGHI:
SHRIMATI SUPRIYA SULE:

Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government is planning to amend the Emigration Act to protect the interests of 50 lakh overseas Indian workers, most of them are semi-skilled and from poor rural backgrounds, and therefore, prone to exploitation;

(b) if so, the details of the amendments that have been finalized in consultation with the missions; and

(c) whether Government has set up a Council for Promotion of Overseas Employment to function as a think-tank for conducting international labour market research and devising strategies for enabling Indian workers to avail themselves of job opportunities abroad?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. The amendments are in the process of being finalized.

(c) The Government proposes to set up a "Council for Promotion of Overseas Employment" as a society under the Societies Registration Act of 1860. The proposed Council will function as a strategic 'Think Tank' and respond to the changes in the international labour market on a real time basis to identify future overseas employment opportunities, the emerging labour supply gaps, country/sector specific skill requirements, make realistic projections and plans for overseas deployment of workers, disseminate relevant information to potential emigrants and implement a sustained skill upgradation programme to match the market requirement. Cabinet has approved the setting up of the Council.

Victims of human trafficking

2729. MS. SUSHILA TIRIYA: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Indian workers in United States have become victims of human trafficking;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(c) the steps Government has taken for the safety of these workers?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRI VAYALAR RAVI): (a) and (b) As per the reports received from the Indian Mission in USA, a total of 590 Indian workers were recruited by the foreign employer M/s Global Resources Inc., Mississippi, through M/s Diwan Consultants, Mumbai. They had gone to US on H2B visas (Guest Workers Visa Programme) valid initially for 10 months, extendable at the discretion of the employer and the US authorities. The workers were deployed in the yards of M/s Signal International, a marine fabrication company, located at Pascagoula, Mississippi and Orange Country, Port Arthur, Texas. They were mainly aggrieved on account of alleged poor accommodation and amenities, deductions from their salary for accommodation, food, electricity, water and also non-fulfilment of the alleged initial commitment of permanent residency status etc.

(c) The Indian Mission in USA has approached the US Government to conduct detailed investigation on the complaints of the Indian workers and take remedial measures. This Ministry has suspended the license of M/s Dewan Consultants and M/s. S. Mansur & Co., Mumbai, blacklisted the foreign employer and is also initiating legal action against the Recruiting Agent for violation of Emigration Act, 1983. The Indian Mission has also taken steps to withhold visas from the main US recruiters involved to prevent them from entering India to conduct recruiting operations.

BRFG for Bihar and Maharashtra

2730. SHRI TARIQ ANWAR: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) the details of works taken up under Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRFG) especially in Bihar and Maharashtra;

(b) the districts covered under this scheme;

(c) whether it is also a fact that special training is provided to representatives of Panchayats for proper implementation of this scheme; and

(d) the funds allocated under this scheme to Bihar and Maharashtra?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) The Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF) includes the component of Rashtriya Sram Vikas Yojana (RSVY) in respect of districts which have not yet claimed their total entitlement of Rs. 45 crore. District Planning Committees have yet not been constituted in Maharashtra, therefore, releases to the districts in the State are limited to the RSVY and capacity building components. Bihar had submitted 36 district plans and 13 RSVY proposals in 2007-08, against which funds were released to the State. Under the BRGF the works/projects taken up in various districts depend on the felt needs and their prioritisation by the Panchayats in rural areas and urban local bodies (ULB) in urban areas and the District Planning Committees. An illustrative list of works taken up under BRGF/RSVY in Bihar and Maharashtra includes construction of anganwadi centres, health centres, kitchen sheds for cooking midday meals in schools, sub health centres, veterinary dispensaries, playgrounds, boundary walls for schools, additional classrooms, panchayat bhawans, community halls, village roads, drainage, electrification, drinking water supply, vocational training, etc. Details of the works taken up in the plans of various districts are available at Ministry's *website www.brgf.gov.in.*

(b) The Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF) programme cover 250 districts across 27 States. The list of districts covered under the BRGF is at Statement-I (*See* below).